

Two months ago, I wrote to President Bush asking for his support for our domestic textile industry in international trade negotiations, including a withdrawal from the recent agreement with Vietnam. Unfortunately, it seems that our trade policy, if not changed, may continue to result in the loss of thousands of North Carolina jobs. Recent agreements have failed to address unfair trade practices, illegal smuggling and other customs fraud, and non-tariff barriers to trade that keep our domestic industry from playing on a level field with our trading partners.

I am concerned that the scheduled negotiations on the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations will put even more jobs at risk. Recent reports from our domestic textile industry suggest that China is poised to seize up to 75 percent of the remaining textile and apparel market once the remaining quotas are removed on January 1, 2005.

Two months ago, I visited workers at the Pillowtex plant in Kannapolis. This plant has suffered severe layoffs and now faces the prospect of closure. If this plant ends some or all of its production, several thousand North Carolinians will lose their jobs.

Many of the Pillowtex workers that I met wore American flags and yellow ribbons in support of our troops. They told me about their children who were deployed to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan. These citizens love their country, make sacrifices for its principles, and trust their elected leaders to fight for their jobs and their communities.

Unfortunately, our deficient national trade policy fails to honor this trust. It is inexcusable that these hard-working North Carolinians may lose their jobs because of poor negotiating tactics and results, such as the recent agreement with Vietnam and other pending agreements.

Quite simply, the decline in textile jobs affects not just individual workers, but entire families and communities. Since 2001, more than 50,000 jobs in our traditional textile, apparel and furniture industries have disappeared. Foreign competition is responsible for many of these losses. These industries now represent about 5 percent of North Carolina's total employment, but account for over 75 percent of our net job losses since 2001. It is no wonder that national unemployment remains so stubbornly high. Exporting American jobs, not American products, seems contrary to your stated goals of economic stimulus and recovery.

As we have asked before, I again strongly urge you to move more aggressively to combat the widespread dumping of textile goods on U.S. markets, address the failure of our trading partners to open their markets to our products, take action to curb currency manipulation, and devote sufficient resources to fight illegal smuggling and customs fraud.

In addition, I urge you to immediately initiate the "special China safeguard" on sensitive textile and apparel categories to control the unfair surge of Chinese imports into the United States market.